



The divide between elites and the electorate

Australians get ready to vote – Report No. 1

Based on the Tapri survey of voters in late December 2024

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Introduction

In the last year or two there has been a trend in some European nations and the US for many voters to reject the agenda embraced by the neoliberal, globalising elite. The new Tapri survey explores whether there is any parallel to this trend among Australian voters.

The survey drew on a random sample of 3023 Australian voters and was conducted between 12 December and 23 December 2024.

The results show that a majority of Australian voters do not support the prevailing neoliberal economic agenda. Nor do they embrace the progressive values and immigration policies often associated with that agenda.

The political implications of this disjunction will be explored in a follow-up second report.

Conceptualising the neoliberal, global elite/electorate divide

There is much information about the electorate, but less about who composes the elite. We refer to them as the men and women who are behind the successful spread of the neoliberal economic agenda across much of the developed world, including Australia, since the 1970s.

This agenda did not come out of the blue. It reflected the interests of multinational manufacturing and financial interests. These interests wanted an end to the governance arrangements which allowed workers to win increased wages, even as inflation and unemployment reached high levels following the global economic downturn of the late 1970s. In Australia, the key backers of this agenda were commodity producers.

Neoliberalism is a doctrine mandating the primacy of market forces. It includes the opening up of global markets in which there is free movement of capital, finance, people, and goods and services. Neoliberalism has also been accompanied by a progressive value set endorsing the virtues of internationalisation and population diversity, both of which values were expected to help win voters' acceptance of the globalising agenda.

Neoliberalism could never have taken hold without the aid of an economic technocracy keen to proselytise on its behalf of, or for, those politicians who were willing to take on the vested interests bedded into the previous more protected global order. We deal with the politicians shortly.

The technocracy refers to those professionals with economic training who have been sponsored by the neoliberal globalising elite to endorse their neoliberal agenda. Since the 1980s in Australia, this policy package has been dominated by advice from The Treasury and Reserve Bank, and from most market and academic economists, as well as think tanks like the Grattan Institute and most variants of the media which are directed at the university educated.

The economic technocracy makes its judgements according to the success of incumbent governments in curbing inflationary outcomes and in allowing maximum room for business to operate profitably. To this end, governments are advised to leave production decisions to private enterprise. Any government action to enter the marketplace is derided as 'picking winners'. Governments must not protect businesses from market pressure, such as by tariffs or other forms of special treatment.

Governments must also minimize subsidies that shield consumers from the competitive marketplace. In effect, the technocracy counsels austerity. This may of course mean pain for many voters, as with high interest rates or unemployment.

What about the politicians constituting the governments implementing these judgements? Where do they fit? Are they part of the elite?

Obviously, these politicians are important. However, we see them more as agents of the elite rather than as part of it. In this light, politicians are seen as opportunistic career professionals. Their careers depend on persuading enough voters to vote for them so that they can win seats and gain, or retain, government power. In Australia, as in the rest of democratic developed world, it has, until recently, been possible to implement the neoliberal agenda without having to worry about voter resistance. No longer, including in Australia.

In Australia, Hawke and Keating were the great pioneers. They did so via a wages pause, supported by an Accord with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). This got the Australian economy going again after the deep recession of 1981-1983. Then, with the urging of the elite and the technocrats, they enacted fundamental neoliberal reform, including deregulating finance, floating the dollar, privatising government authorities and enacting a sharp reduction in tariffs.

This ended the protectionist order that had sustained Australia's industrialisation after World War 2.

There were electoral tensions but, because the Coalition opposition favored even more severe reform, it was not until the mid-1990s that parts of Labor's historic working-class constituency began to move towards the Coalition. This shift helped the Coalition win a great victory in the 1996 Federal election under the leadership of John Howard. Why would voters choose the Coalition, a grouping even more committed to neoliberalism than Labor? Possibly some of them were attracted to the Coalition's resistance to some of the progressive values that Labor had promoted.

But the Howard government was eventually defeated in 2007. Since then successive Labor and Coalition governments have continued to implement the neoliberal agenda. They have been able to do so because it has worked. Australia lost the industrial legacy of the protectionist age but found a niche in the global marketplace as a commodity producer.

This situation is ending. The Albanese Labor government was elected in May 2022. But since then the level of financial insecurity, especially housing stress has mounted. These stresses have opened up possibilities for politicians to mobilise the voters affected. So have voter concerns about progressive values and associated Big Australia migration policies.

Developments in other advanced economies have shown that, as dissent of this kind mounts, the neoliberal political order can be challenged, as Trump has proved in the US. Trump first seized the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 behind his America First banner, and then went on to win the election. He subsequently took over the Republican party, in the process fundamentally challenging the previous leaders' hold over the party's agenda. He rejected its core open borders, free trade platform. Trump is the prototype opportunistic politician who, in 2024, again successfully mobilised voters discontented with America's inequalities, rustbelts and woke values.

Could this happen here? Perhaps not. The depth of bi-partisan support for neoliberalism within the Coalition and Labor parties makes any such move unlikely. Such an upheaval also depends on the extent of discontent within the electorate. Most commentators think Australian voters are not particularly disaffected. Their preoccupation, it is said, is with hip pocket issues.¹

Our survey results show that this judgement is wrong. Most Australian voters do not accept the prevailing neoliberal agenda or its associated progressive values. They especially do not accept the Big Australia immigration commitments. The elite's agenda hangs like a veneer above most voters, barely touching their judgements on most issues.

We do not take a stand on whether the neoliberal agenda has merit or not. Of course, at a time when inflation is high, increases in public expenditure can add to inflation. But concerns about this are not always justified. It is doubtful whether this is the case as of early 2025 when a whole generation of young Australians is being disenfranchised from home ownership or even affordable rental accommodation. Since the housing shortage of the early post-World War 2 era, this is unprecedented. Given that the Federal Government's debt to GDP ratio is way below that of most European nations and of the US, this is arguably the wrong time for austerity.

In any case, what matters for the election outcome is what voters think. The majority do not understand or care about the technocracy's worries about the inflationary impact of government expenditure.

Most commentators, like Paul Kelly, have got it wrong. They think another dose of neoliberal reform, as embodied in the Coalition's 'Back to Basics' economic agenda (explored in Report No. 2) will help win the election.

The reverse is the case. The Coalition may win the election because of voters' impatience with Labor's economic record, and its woke agenda and immigration policies. If it does, the win will be despite its 'back to basics' policies. For its part, Labor may hang on to power precisely because it is pursuing a public expenditure binge directed as voters' needs.

One winner may be the Greens, who are reaching out to voters, as with promises of state intervention to deal with the housing crisis. As we show in Report No. 2, there is a receptive constituency of young voters who are likely to transfer their vote to the Greens as a result.

The electorate is not what most commentators think it is

In the current context, a surge in antisemitism and agitation based on ethnic communities, has prompted many to declare that Australia has become a divided, diversity-driven society (and electorate).

This is wrong. Australia is remarkably integrated considering the scale and global spread of migrant source countries. With 30 percent of the population born overseas, Australia is an outlier.

However, the electorate is different from the resident population. Millions of recent arrivals are not citizens and thus cannot vote. Around 20 percent of voters are overseas born – in our sample it was 18 percent. Most of these have been in Australia for years, with plenty of time to integrate should they desire to do so.

Most do desire to do so. As we detail later, the majority of European and English-speaking-background migrant voters have a strong sense of belonging to Australia, indeed just as strong as that of Australian-born voters, if not stronger.

With this attachment comes support for government intervention to provide for fellow Australians doing it tough. If leading politicians were articulating a Trump-like Australia-first agenda, most overseas-born voters would support it, as they also would support policies for making things in Australia safe behind tariff walls.

And crucially, there is also a strong belief among migrant voters that loyalty to Australia should have priority over sectional, ethnic or heritage community.

This means the end of the era of multiculturalism in Australia. There can be no repeat of the Frazer and Hawke/Keating years, when politicians cultivated a big multicultural constituency. Most migrant voters now are actually opposed to its renewal. The only potential voter constituency is amongst recently arrived, mainly Asian, communities. But most of these are not yet voters.

The progressive values agenda

As indicated, there has tended to be an association between neoliberal economic policies and the progressive values agenda, sometimes summarised as identity politics. This was clear cut during the Hawke/Keating reform era in the 1980s and 1990s. They believed that Australia could best achieve their aspiration to internationalise the economy if Australian voters were induced to ditch their previous isolationist and protectionist values. They should replace these outworn values with a celebration of population diversity, including multiculturalism and openness to all things Asian, including Asian migrants. Keating, in particular, accompanied this program with the promotion of minority autonomy, or quasi separatism, especially for Australia's indigenous community. More recently, support for an energy transformation based on renewable energy has been added to this list. Any objections to this values agenda are now likely to be labelled by the technocracy and its champions in the media as immoral.

This value set has been imprinted within the Labor party and among most university graduates as well as within the school system.

However, the value set was breached during the Howard era. Howard concluded that his Government could flourish electorally if, on the one hand, it implemented the neoliberal economic agenda, while on the other hand reaching out to a sometimes restless electorate by combatting the Hawke/Keating progressive value set. For example, the Howard Government's electoral success in the early 2000's was built on its tough stand against boat-people, uninvited would-be immigrants, who were labelled as an unwelcome invasion.

This split is still evident today. The Coalition, has at times, such as when Turnbull was its leader, muted its opposition to the progressive value agenda. However, as the influence of more conservative elements within the party has increased, reflected in the election of Dutton as leader in 2022, the Coalition has taken a more aggressive anti-progressive stance. Its opposition to the voice referendum in 2023 and its tougher stance on immigration exemplifies this stance.

As we will detail in report No. 2, it seems that the Coalition will repeat the Howard era tactic of running a tough neoliberal economic line, but a contrarian stance on the progressive agenda. If it can capture votes from those restive about this agenda it might be able to offset voters' concerns about its 'back to basics' economic agenda. Much depends on how deep and widespread voter concerns are about Labor's progressive policies.

Immigration

As noted, immigration was a vote changing issue in Australia in the early 2000s. Whether it could be again, in a context where illegal entry is no longer a major concern, remains to be seen. Australia has experienced much higher levels of immigration relative to population than almost all other OECD countries.² High immigration has become an integral part of neoliberal elite strategy, reflected until recently in bipartisan political-party endorsement. But unlike many other western nations, illegal immigration to Australia has been minimal.

This bipartisan commitment to a high migrant intake dates to the end of the first China commodity boom in 2015 when, for a time, prices and demand fell for Australia’s key commodity exports, including iron ore and coal. The Coalition Government in power at the time resorted to boosting immigration in order to keep the economy humming. Successive governments, with elite support, have sustained this strategy. All have endorsed Big Australia policies.

This strategy was turbocharged after the Covid emergency when economic growth slowed to a crawl. The Coalition Government then turned on the immigration tap. Since winning the May 2022 Federal election, the Labor Government has let this tap gush. During 2022-23 and 2023-24 net overseas migration (NOM) added an unprecedented near one million extra residents.

How is this going to play out in electoral terms? Maybe not well given the electorate’s rejection the recent surge in immigration levels.

We now turn to the evidence by charting voters’ views, first on the neoliberal economic agenda, then the associated progressive value set and finally on immigration.

Survey results

Most voters do not support the neoliberal agenda

Tapri’s research shows that most voters do not endorse the elite’s neoliberal agenda.

There is majority opposition to free trade. Most voters want Australia to be making things. If it takes tariffs to make this happen, as Table 1 shows, they are in favor of this strategy.

Table 1: ‘The share of manufacturing in Australia’s economy is less than half of what it was forty years ago. Do you think...’%

	%
<i>We should protect Australia’s manufacturing, using tariffs if necessary</i>	67
<i>We should get rid of all tariffs so that we can buy goods more cheaply from overseas</i>	15
<i>Don’t know</i>	18
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

According to the technocracy, governments must keep out of the marketplace. Economic forces should be allowed to shape outcomes. A majority of voters are immune to this message. Most want more, rather than less, government intervention in the economy.

Not only that, they are also in favor of funds being taken from the rich. Over half of the electorate support increasing taxes on high income earners in order to aid the less well-off (see Table 2).

A majority of voters think governments should provide subsidies as for energy bills (Table 3).

Most (70 percent) think government should subsidize the construction of new homes (Table 3) and that it should build new houses for rent and for sale (Table 4).

Table 2: ‘Labor and the Coalition have both at times said that they support lower taxes for individuals and for businesses.

‘Some people say this [lower taxes]would boost economic growth.

‘Others say we should increase taxes for the rich and big business. This would reduce inequality and help pay for better services.

‘What is your view?’ %

	%
<i>We should reduce taxes for both rich and poor</i>	24
<i>We should stop reducing tax levels. The existing rates are appropriate</i>	18
<i>We should increase tax rates for high income earners and big business</i>	47
<i>Subtotal: Stop reducing tax levels and increase them for high income earners and big business</i>	65
<i>Don’t know</i>	11
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 3: Government subsidies

Some people think the current Labor Government’s subsidies (handouts) for energy bills, solar projects and the like are justified. Others think they push up government expenditure and contribute to the Reserve Bank’s high interest rate policy. What do you think %

	%
<i>I think these subsidies (handouts) are justified</i>	53
<i>I think these subsidies (handouts) should be curbed</i>	29
<i>Don’t know/no opinion</i>	18
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 4: Governments themselves should build a large number of homes, both for rent and for sale. %

	%
<i>Strongly support</i>	28
<i>Support</i>	42
<i>Strongly support and support</i>	70
<i>Oppose</i>	12
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	7
<i>Oppose and strongly oppose</i>	19
<i>No opinion</i>	11
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 5: Governments should subsidise the construction of new homes %

	%
<i>Strongly support</i>	21
<i>Support</i>	41
<i>Strongly support and support</i>	61
<i>Oppose</i>	17
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	7
<i>Oppose and strongly oppose</i>	24
<i>No opinion</i>	14
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Most voters do not support the progressive values agenda

In previous surveys we have shown that most voters do not share the progressive value agenda.³ The extent of the divide was illustrated with the outcome of the voice referendum in October 2023. When given the chance to vote on a cherished progressive priority, that is the elevation of Indigenous community separatism via constitutional recognition of the voice, 60 per cent of the electorate voted No. Our study of why, based on previous Tapri findings, showed that a major factor was that to support the voice was seen as supporting a divided Australian polity.⁴

The new December 2024 survey contained questions which further tested voters' attitudes to the progressive agenda. For example, most voters do not support gender fluidity (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6: A number of people who were born male now identify as female. Do you think they should be allowed to compete in women's sports? %

	%
<i>Yes</i>	11
<i>No</i>	74
<i>Don't know</i>	14
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 7: 'Some people argue that a woman is anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of their sex when born. What do you think?' %

	%
<i>Strongly agree</i>	9
<i>Agree</i>	16
<i>Total strongly agree or agree</i>	25
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	22
<i>Disagree</i>	21
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	32
<i>Total disagree or strongly disagree</i>	53
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

A new question on progressive values was directed at voters' views on migrant selection. It asked them to reflect on the progressive orthodoxy that migrant selection should not consider applicants' values or way of life. This is a key marker of the progressive concern about tolerance and diversity. Table 8 shows that a majority of voters decisively rejected this view. They believe that the ability to 'fit-in' should be taken seriously when migrants are selected.

'Both the Labor Party and the Coalition have said that they will reduce the permanent entry intake of migrants.'

Table 8: ‘Do you think that selection policy should include taking into account a migrant’s ability to fit into the Australian community?’ %

	%
<i>Yes. We should take their ability to fit in seriously</i>	59
<i>No. Religion, values and way of life should not affect selection decisions</i>	28
<i>Don’t know</i>	13
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

As indicated earlier, the most recent addition to the progressive values agenda has been support for policies limiting carbon emissions. This is now a signature commitment with Federal Labor. But how far has the electorate absorbed this commitment? The answer is not much. In response to a question about climate change just 33 percent of the electorate said they were very worried about climate change. See Table 9.

Table 9: ‘Are you worried about climate change?’

	%
<i>Yes, very worried</i>	33
<i>Yes, slightly worried</i>	41
<i>Not at all worried</i>	22
<i>No opinion</i>	3
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Most voters do not support a Big Australia

There is also minimal voter support for a Big Australia. Only 11 per cent of the electorate support the current high migration settings. See Table 10.

The question on immigration began with this preamble:

Since Australia’s borders were re-opened after the pandemic, net overseas migration has increased. From 1990 to 2019 the annual intake averaged just over 152,000.

In the year to March 2024 net overseas migration reached 509,700. This was more than the previous year to March 2023: 491,800.

These are the highest numbers on record. What is your opinion about immigration?

Table 10: ‘What is your opinion about immigration?’ %

	%
<i>I want the high numbers to continue</i>	11
<i>We should return to net migration at somewhat lower levels</i>	27
<i>We should return to net migration at much lower levels</i>	27
<i>We should keep migration low enough so that new arrivals just balance out departures</i>	27
<i>Subtotal for preferring lower numbers</i>	80
<i>Don’t know</i>	9
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Note: Numbers may not add exactly because of rounding.

Table 11 shows that only 27 percent of voters think that Australia needs more people: the rest, 73 percent, say that we do not. This question has been asked in earlier surveys and Table 11 shows that the proportion of voters saying that we do not need more people has increased from 65% in 2022 to 73% in December 2024.

Table 11: ‘Overall do you think that Australia needs more people?’ 2022 to 2024

	2022	2023	2024
	%	%	%
<i>Yes</i>	35	29	27
<i>No</i>	65	71	73
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	3019	3001	3023

Most voters see a direct link between high immigration and the deterioration of the urban environment, including unaffordable housing and competition for public health and other services. For example, 76 percent believe ‘adding more people will push up the price of housing’ (see Table 12).

Table 12: ‘Adding more people will push up the cost of housing.’ %

	%
<i>Agree strongly</i>	41
<i>Agree</i>	35
<i>Agree strongly and agree</i>	76
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	17
<i>Disagree</i>	6
<i>Disagree strongly</i>	1
<i>Disagree and disagree strongly</i>	7
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

In sum, there is majority voter dissent on the neoliberal agenda, and its associated progressive values, as well on Big Australia immigration policies.

In exploring the implications of this dissent we wanted to know whether Australian voters are aware of the divide. In the US they certainly are, as measured by voters’ judgement that elites pay no attention to their concerns: thus, as a result, their belief that America is on the ‘wrong track’.⁵

Our survey indicates that there is a trend towards such views here. When asked whether they thought elites ignored their views, a strong majority (62 percent) said that this is the case (Table 13). Also, 47 percent thought that Australia was on the wrong track compared with just 33 percent who thought that it was on the right track (Table 14).

Table 13: ‘When the government makes decisions, they don’t pay attention to what people like me think. Elites make the decisions to suit themselves.’ %

	%
<i>I agree</i>	62
<i>I don’t agree. People like me can make an impact.</i>	24
<i>Don’t know/not sure</i>	14
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 14: ‘Some people worry about Australia’s future. What is your view?’ %

	%
<i>I think Australia is on the right track</i>	33
<i>I think Australia is on the wrong track</i>	47
<i>Don’t know/not sure</i>	21
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

The results across these three sets of issues are startling. Perhaps they just reflect the recent poor performance of the Australian economy in delivering wage gains and affordable housing?

The findings suggest that this dissent goes deeper than financial stress, tough though it may be. Rather, this dissent is anchored in patriotism. Our hypothesis is that, to the extent that voters feel they are part of a national community, they are likely to support government intervention to help less well-off citizens, even if they themselves are not enduring severe hardship. As members of the Australian community they want to help others and they also want government to take direct action to strengthen Australia’s industrial base.

The patriotic base is there. Most voters say that they feel a strong sense of identity as Australians and of belongingness to Australia. See Table 15 and Table 16.

The question set out in Table 15 was part of number that referenced the voice referendum. This question began with this preamble:

In the lead up to the 2023 referendum on an Indigenous voice there was much talk about Indigenous people having a special connection to the land and of Australia being their homeland.

How important to you is the idea of Australia being your home?

Table 15: ‘Just as it is for Indigenous people, Australia is my special home too.’ %

	%
<i>Agree strongly</i>	44
<i>Agree</i>	36
<i>Agree strongly and agree</i>	80
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	16
<i>Disagree</i>	3
<i>Disagree strongly</i>	1
<i>Disagree and disagree strongly</i>	4
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

In a less specific context, towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked: ‘To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?’ Table 16 shows the results.

Table 16: ‘To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?’

	%
<i>A great extent</i>	58
<i>A moderate extent</i>	32
<i>Only slightly</i>	9
<i>Not at all</i>	2
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

We explored whether those who have a strong sense of belonging are also more likely to support government intervention for the less well-off and to want to boost the national industrial base.

Table 17: ‘The share of manufacturing in Australia’s economy is less than half of what it was forty years ago. Do you think—’ by ‘To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?’ %

<i>Protection for manufacturing</i>	<i>To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?</i>				
	<i>A great extent</i>	<i>A moderate extent</i>	<i>Only slightly</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>We should protect Australia’s manufacturing, using tariffs if necessary</i>	73	62	56	41	67
<i>We should get rid of all tariffs so that we can buy goods more cheaply from overseas</i>	11	18	22	22	15
<i>Don’t know</i>	16	20	22	36	18
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	1742	964	258	58	3023

Table 17 shows that voters with a stronger sense of belonging to Australia are much more likely to favour tariff protection than those who have a more attenuated sense of belonging or none at all.

And Table 18 shows that those whose sense of attachment to Australia is strongest are more likely to prefer training our own people as opposed to bringing in migrant workers to fill vacancies.

Table 18: ‘Many employers argue that it’s hard to find workers and that temporary and permanent immigration should be encouraged to help fill job vacancies. Which of the following is closest to your views?’ By ‘To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?’ %

<i>Bringing in migrant workers versus training our own</i>	<i>To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?</i>				
	A great extent	A moderate extent	Only slightly	Not at all	Total
<i>They are right We should let in as many migrant workers as employers want to employ.</i>	19	24	25	14	21
<i>They are wrong We should deal with worker shortages by raising wages and improving skills training for locals.</i>	70	62	64	61	67
<i>Don't know</i>	10	15	10	25	12
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	1742	965	258	59	3023

The voting public and the resident population are different

Political commentators are often unaware that the distinctive characteristics of the Australian electorate mean that there is likely to be a relatively high share of voters who lean towards the responses outlined above. For a start, voters have to be citizens. At the time of the 2021 census 29.3% of Australia’s population had been overseas born and, in 2023 30.7% were overseas born. This was the highest proportion since 1892.⁶

As of the 2021 census 83.6 of the population (aged 15 plus) were citizens and 16.4 percent were not. This means that of the 25.5 million aged 15 plus in 2021, 4.2 million of the population were not citizens,⁷ and thus would not be eligible to vote.

As a result, the electorate is predominantly Australia-born, 82 percent in our sample. This means that the great majority of voters have been raised in Australia, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will have absorbed Australian traditions of mateship, equality and Australian ‘fair go’ values.

A second feature of the Australian electorate, also rarely appreciated by commentators, is the extent to which migrants have integrated into Australian society and themselves share these ‘Australian values’. The dominant perception now is that Australia has become a nation of tribes. This is especially the case in the recent context of migrant community-based agitation on

behalf of Palestinians, often colored with anti-Semitism. Some think this is a consequence of policies favoring multiculturalism.

They don't need to worry, at least for the great majority of migrants eligible to vote. Tapri's findings show that most migrants, especially those from European and English-speaking-background migrants, have integrated into Australian society. One measure, used in the Tapri survey, was the extent to which migrants have a strong sense of belonging to Australia.

Table 19 shows most do have a strong sense of belonging. Indeed, in the case of those born in Europe and in English-speaking-background countries, they have a stronger sense of belonging to Australia than do the Australian-born.

Table 19: 'To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?' by birthplace? %

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>A great extent</i>	58	60	69	42	46	58
<i>A moderate extent</i>	32	29	25	42	31	32
<i>Only slightly</i>	8	10	4	14	19	9
<i>Not at all</i>	2	1	2	1	4	2
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2482	226	85	146	84	3023

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries.

And Table 20 shows most of these voters have had enough of diversity – they want less of it than more of it.

Table 20: 'Some people argue we should increase immigration in order to increase our ethnic and other forms of diversity. What is your view?' by country of birth %

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Yes, more diversity will give Australia a more vibrant society and economy</i>	22	20	15	43	28	23
<i>No We have enough diversity</i>	37	38	38	29	37	37
<i>No We need to encourage national unity and a shared Australian identity</i>	30	36	36	21	22	30
<i>Total No</i>	67	74	74	50	59	66
<i>Don't know</i>	12	6	11	8	14	11
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2480	208	81	145	87	3001

Note: The data in Table 20 are from the 2023 Tapri survey.

Even more striking, these integrated migrants, despite their heritage, share the wider Australian voter opinion that immigration levels should be cut.

Table 21 shows that strong majorities of all birthplace groups would prefer a migrant intake with much lower numbers. Immigrants from English-speaking-background countries and Europe actually have stronger feelings on this question than do the Australian born.

‘Since Australia’s borders were re-opened after the pandemic, net overseas migration has increased. From 1990 to 2019 the annual intake averaged just over 152,000.

‘In the year to March 2024 net overseas migration reached 509,700. This was more than the previous year to March 2023: 491,800.

‘These are the highest numbers on record.

Table 21: ‘What is your opinion about immigration?’ by birthplace %

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>I want the high numbers to continue</i>	11	10	9	14	27	11
<i>We should return to net migration at somewhat lower levels</i>	26	28	21	38	30	27
<i>We should return to net migration at much lower levels</i>	27	29	32	19	15	27
<i>We should keep migration low enough so that new arrivals just balance out departures</i>	27	27	33	19	24	27
<i>Subtotal for preferring lower numbers</i>	80	83	86	77	70	80
<i>Don’t know</i>	9	7	5	10	4	9
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2482	227	85	146	82	3023

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries.

Equally striking, Table 22 indicates that Australians born in English-speaking background countries and in Europe, favour migration policies which take account of the migrant’s ability

to fit into Australian society. Given the prevailing progressive orthodoxy that migration policy should tolerate or even advance ethnic diversity, it is remarkable that so many migrant voters reject this stance.

'Both the Labor Party and the Coalition have said that they will reduce the permanent entry intake of migrants.'

Table 22: 'Do you think that selection policy should include taking into account a migrant's ability to fit into the Australian community?' by country of birth%

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Yes We should take their ability to fit in seriously</i>	58	72	61	55	58	59
<i>No Religion, values and way of life should not affect selection decisions</i>	29	16	22	34	33	28
<i>Don't know</i>	13	12	16	11	10	13
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2482	227	85	146	83	3023

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries.

On neoliberal issues majorities of all birthplace groups favour economic protection for manufacturing, including the use of tariffs. See Table 23.

Table 23: ‘The share of manufacturing in Australia’s economy is less than half of what it was forty years ago. Do you think...’ by birthplace%

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>We should protect Australia’s manufacturing, using tariffs if necessary</i>	68	68	62	64	61	67
<i>We should get rid of all tariffs so that we can buy goods more cheaply from overseas</i>	14	11	19	25	23	15
<i>Don’t know</i>	18	22	19	12	17	18
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2482	227	85	146	84	3023

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries.

It is also the case that big majorities of all birthplace groups, with the exception of the small group labelled other,⁸ prefer training our own and boosting wages as opposed to allowing employers to bring in as many migrant workers as they need. See Table 24.

Table 24: ‘Many employers argue that it’s hard to find workers and that temporary and permanent immigration should be encouraged to help fill job vacancies. Which of the following is closest to your views?’ By birthplace %

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>They are right We should let in as many migrant workers as employers want to employ</i>	20	19	19	30	41	21
<i>They are wrong We should deal with worker shortages by raising wages and improving skills training for locals</i>	67	68	74	62	49	67
<i>Don’t know</i>	12	13	7	8	10	12
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	2481	227	85	147	83	3023

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries.

Conclusion

The neoliberal orthodoxy of austerity, with outcomes determined by the competitive marketplace, does not sit well with the electorate, irrespective of their country of birth. Most voters also reject the associated progressive values agenda. Furthermore, big majorities oppose the high levels of immigration prevailing in recent years.

Current concerns that Australia is becoming a nation of tribes, intolerant of each other, are baseless. Most overseas-born voters are just as patriotic as their Australian-born counterparts. They do not want more diversity. They value their heritage, but their priority is integration as Australian citizens.

They are uncomfortable with multiculturalism, defined as celebrating Australia as an amalgam of ethnic and indigenous communities. And, like other Australian voters, they want additional migrants to be chosen with an eye to ‘fitting into’ the community.

The ethos of neoliberalism, progressive values and high immigration is best thought of as a veneer, hanging over the top of the electorate, which for the most part does not accept it.

In Europe and the US where there is a well-documented divide between the neoliberal elite and voters on these questions, the political consequences have been significant. Could this also be the case in Australia? We explore this issue in report no. 2.

Method

The survey ran from 12 December 2024 to 23 December 2024. Questions were chosen, and the analysis was done, by Tapri. Pureprofile collected data from a random national sample of 3023 people drawn their panel source of over 450,000. The survey was restricted to voters. Quotas were set with a 10 per cent leeway in line with the ABS distribution for age, gender, and location. The final data were then weighted to the actual age, gender, location and graduate/non-graduate status distribution according to the ABS Census. Participants were offered points as token rewards (these could be used to gain access to a cash raffle, taken as a \$1 payment, or donated to charity). The survey took them approximately ten minutes to complete.

Notes

¹ Paul Kelly, 'Donald Trump's agenda won't work for Anthony Albanese or Peter Dutton', *The Australian*, 1 February 2025

² As of 2022 only Luxemburg and Switzerland had a higher proportion of foreign-born people in their population: [OECD data on Foreign-born as share of population](#), %, 2022. Since July 2022 net overseas migration to Australia has boomed; in the year to June 2023 there were 535,520 net arrivals and in the year to June 2024, 445,640. ABS, [Net Overseas Migration](#)

³ Katharine Betts and Bob Birrell, [Australian voters' views since the voice referendum: main report](#), The Australian Population Research Institute, 2024

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ See for example, *Challenges to Democracy: The 2024 Election in Focus*, [PRRI Research](#), 11 October 2024

⁶ [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) (ABS)

⁷ Data on citizenship derived from the ABS 2021 census via the Table Builder function.

⁸ 'Other' includes the Middle East, Africa and Central and South America.